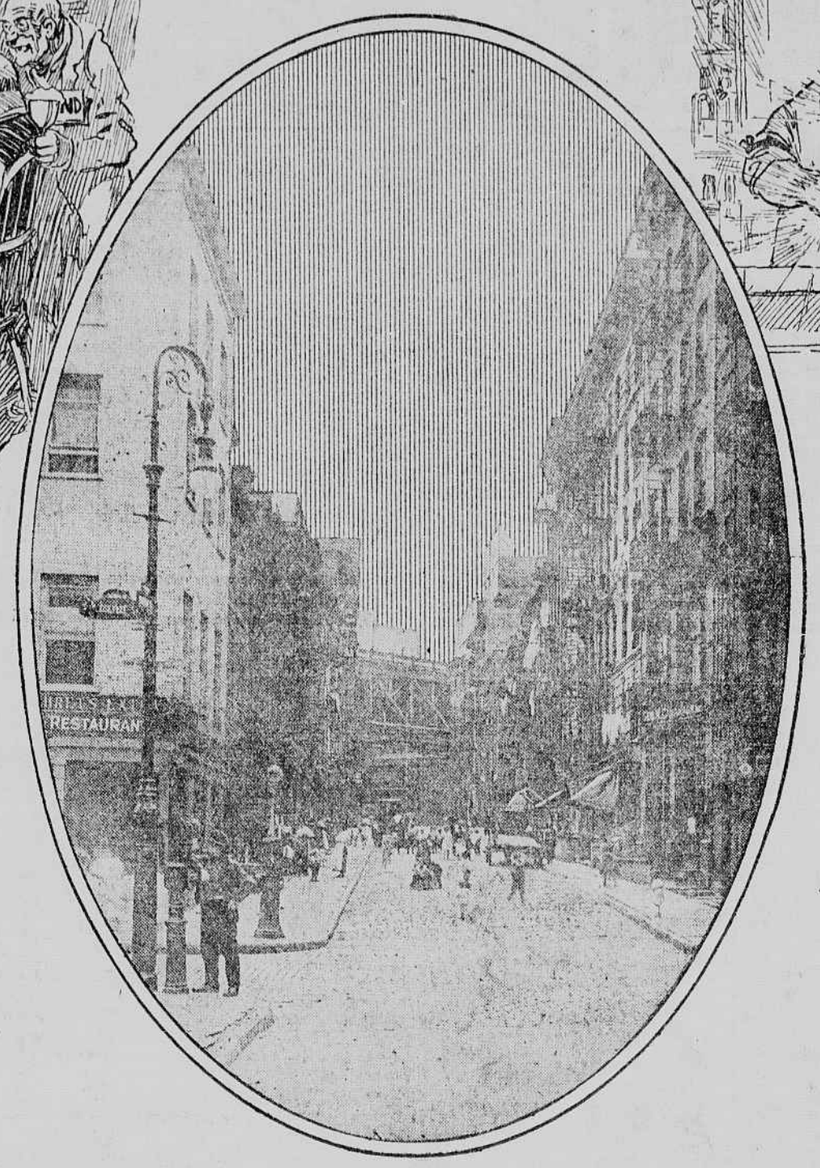
OLD POLICE TRAILS IN THE TOWN THAT WAS

Not all pirate lairs were along the Spanish Main; there was a famous one on Cherry Street. As to dives, where in New York to-day could you find a Fleabag?

By ARTHUR JAMES PEGLER

Drawings by J. NORMAN LYND

Lewis collected his fifteen per cent of takings when the beggars reported



Cherry Street, where river pirates had their headquarters at the Sailors' Rest.

When his hands twinkled as he served drinks Dan's star was shining bright

"A PLACE that would have delighted Robert Louis Stevenson, Morgan Robertson or any of those old sea writers was 'The Sailor's Rest,' in Cherry Hill, a sort of crimps' dive and boarding house run by 'Mother' Olson."

The speaker was Francis Cadell, former New York City detective, lately retired after thirty-eight years' service. I found him on the porch of his home in Brooklyn. His mood was reminiscent.

"This woman was a Scandinavian with a bad record," Cadell went on. "Her place was the favorite haunt of Jerry McAuley, afterward as a reformed character in charge of the McAuley Mission. He headed a gang of river pirates.

"McAuley's men robbed tramp steamships in New York Harbor and the river, breaking cargo into barges or tugs and hauling away their loot while the ship's officers lay drugged ashore and the anchor watch aboard was bound and gagged in a locked cabin.

"The principal members of this gang, aside from McAuley, were 'Big Ned' Ryan, 'Snag' Cooper, Roy Cunningham, Ed O'Laughlin and Tim Naylor. O'Laughlin was once a trusted employee of the Ward Line Steamship Company.

"The way these fellows worked was to make friends with officers of tramp ships and entertain them ashore. One of the favorite resorts was Hugh Ellis's restaurant in Roosevelt Street near the Bowery. While McAuley and some of the gang wined and dined the officers their associates entertained the crew at 'Mother' Olson's. Before midnight the whole ship's company except the anchor watch that remained aboard would be unconscious from drugs. The pirates would steam alongside the ship, overpower the watch, break out as much cargo as they could dispose of handily and be away before an alarm could be raised.

"A successful raid like that would set the river pirates on Easy Street for months. One reason why they escaped capture so long was that they timed their operations to coincide with periods when long police watchfulness had given place to a perfunctory patrol.

"Just when everything seemed safe and orderly there would be another pirate raid, followed by still another period of futile police activity. McAuley confessed at one time that more than $10,000,000 worth of goods had been stolen from ships in the harbor by his and associated gangs of pirates.

"The Swedish tramp ship Nordland was boarded one night by McAuley's men after all the officers and eleven men of the crew had been drugged and put to bed. The pirates figured that only the usual anchor watch was being maintained on board, but a surprise awaited them. Captain Nilsson of the Nordland had been posted on the methods of McAuley. He left an armed guard aboard, instructing men given shore leave to feign drunkenness, but to keep their wits about them. When the pirates swarmed aboard the Nordland they were met by determined seamen, who fought them off, wounding 'Carrots' Colby. The latter fell into the bay and was drowned. Nilsson and his crew aboard a police boat arrived too late to capture the gang, but a description of the tug led to the capture by Inspector Henry V. Steers of the 2d District and Captain Alexander Williams of the 4th Precinct station of McAuley, Ryan, Cooper, Cunningham and O'Laughlin. All were convicted.

"River piracy had proved so profitable that other gangs tried to emulate McAuley, but these fellows were not in the same class for daring and skill and they soon dispersed.

"McAuley enjoyed powerful friendships. On several occasions he escaped punishment. When Jerry found himself landed in the Tombs he had no trouble in arranging so that he and his men could enjoy liberty. There were queer doings at the Tombs when 'Fatty' Walsh was warden there. While the McAuley gang awaited trial Tombs discipline became considerably relaxed.

"As soon as darkness fell old Jerry Buckley's seagoing hack, that always stood where the Bridge of Sighs is now, would draw near. McAuley and his men would be hauled to Billy McGlory's saloon, where they would remain all night, returning to the Tombs for breakfast." Any prisoner who was 'right' politically and had money to spend could get the night out by negotiation. Old man Buckley's one-eyed horse never got much rest.

"The fact is that during the time I am writing of the Tombs was run much after the manner of a Mulberry Bend dive, which must have suited the inmates very well, for many of them came from that locality. 'Big Jim' Lehnon, who was head keeper under Walsh, herded the prisoners on these nocturnal rambles. He was a popular official.

"Did you ever hear of 'Blinkey' Lewis? Lewis's crew of beggars in New York City numbered 300. He had a secretary named Carroll, known as 'Scarecrow' Carroll, who handled correspondence with heads of beggar gangs in other cities, all of whom recognized the authority of 'Blinkey.'

"The headquarters of the New York Panhandlers' Club was at 180 Park Row, behind the once famous saloon of 'Diamond Dan' O'Rourke. Dan was a remarkable character, popular with the horse-racing crowd. When in luck with the ponies he wore rings set with big diamonds on all his fingers and both thumbs. Many a time I've seen him wearing diamonds enough to stock a jewelry store. His decorations disappeared with a run of bad luck, until his only remaining gem would be a diamond solitaire stud. The stone was as big as a nickel. It shone in his shirt front. Simpson, the loan man, took charge of Dan's famous headlight occasionally, but that was always the first thing he redeemed when luck changed.

"It was easy to gauge O'Rourke's financial status by the amount of jewelry he wore. If the big diamond blazed on his breast all was well. When his hands twinkled as he served drinks Dan's star was shining bright.

"The gathering place for Lewis's corps of beggars was behind Dan's saloon. It was a storeroom for disused saloon fixtures. There Lewis collected his 15 per cent of takings when the panhandlers reported from their runs each night. Lewis used to sit in a dilapidated armchair at the head of a long table. Sometimes there would be as many as fifty beggars in the room at one time. I have seen the top of the table covered with nickels, dimes, quarters and half dollars.

"I don't know how Lewis held his control over such a gang, but hold it he did. His income from the New York beggars alone was said to be $400 a week. Regular tribute was collected from other cities. There were sick benefits and such features that went with membership in the organization.

"The walls of this room showed charts indicating various beggar routes and stands. Some of the beggars worked on fixed posts. Others traveled beats. Lewis knew what every stand or route was good for if properly worked. In cases where beggars failed to bring in a reasonable proportion of the sum set down against the concession they would be removed and others assigned to the territory. Mendicants were held rigidly to positions or runs given them. Any man who tried to evade 'Blinkey's' orders would be chased off the streets by walking delegates of the club.

"Among Lewis's professional intimates were 'Slim' Newton, 'Poke' Taylor, 'Ben the Bat,' a blind man; 'Curley' Blondon, otherwise 'Weepy Charley'; 'Pegleg' Wells and 'Scarface' Porter. These were stars of the downtown gang, all deformed one way or another. I believe they averaged between $20 and $30 a day the year round.

"Lewis lived in a handsome apartment on Central Park West. His wife, an attractive blonde, was known about town as Mrs. Lewis Crafts. I have seen references in the newspaper society columns to her bridge parties. Lewis was known in the park section as a broker. Mrs. "Crafts" owned a private carriage with a pair of bay horses. I believe she was the first woman to drive her own motor car in downtown streets.

"I ought to mention while on the subject of Dan O'Rourke that his big diamond was given him by James J. Jeffries a few days before the big fellow lost the heavyweight championship. They had long been friends.

"Ever hear of 'The Fleabag'? 128 Park Row? It used to be headquarters of Jack Cirocco, a gang leader of the early 80's. Cirocco was one of the most desperate characters the police of that period had to deal with. Like most men of his type he had powerful friends who contrived to extricate him from tight places. Cirocco operated with 'Monk' Eastman, 'Kid' Twist and 'Humpty' Jackson. Twist was shot and killed at Coney Island in 1889. Eastman survived until 1920, when another gunman shot him to death.

"'The Fleabag' was originally 'The Fleabite.' The title was conferred on it by Mrs. Harry Smith, wife of the original owner. She was formerly Kate Duffy. I knew her when she served as cashier in a downtown Childs restaurant. During the Coney Island season she sang in a vaudeville show there. On her way back to New York one night she was injured in a surface car accident. She recovered $10,000 damages. This sum, she said, was a mere fleabite. With it Mrs. Smith and her husband opened the saloon which became known as 'The Fleabag.' It was never what you might call a popular resort, but, owing to its peculiar name, it long held a place on the lists of underworld guides.

"Another tough joint was 'The Plug Hat,' at 10 Bowery. This place was operated in the 80's by Dan Kelly, a well known character. His following were mostly horseracing touts. Kelly was an imaginative fellow, possessed of absolute faith in signs and omens. Originally his saloon was known as 'By the Way.' Business fell off and seemed to be getting worse all the time until one night Kelly attended a Tammany meeting, got in a fight and had his plug hat smashed. I forgot to mention that he always wore a tall hat and frock coat with braid round the edges.

"When Dan returned after the Tammany fracas there had been a fight in the saloon. A transom over the front door had been broken. He plugged the hole with his battered tile and changed the name of the place to 'The Plug Hat.' Later he told me that name entirely changed his fortune. The saloon did a thriving business.

"Some of the most notorious political jobs in the history of Manhattan were rigged in Kelly's place. It was headquarters for a gang of desperadoes and repeaters operating under direction of 'Broken-Nose' Sullivan, long dead. Gunmen congregated there to be ordered out by Sullivan according to numbers. You would see a man rush in there shouting numbers like a football captain calling signals. 'Numbers 9, 17, 14, 28 and 12, report to Burke,' the messenger would roar, and then you'd see the men answering to those numbers hustle out. They had a job on.

"'Broken-Nose' Sullivan was an all-round political heeler. He swung quite an influence in that day. Sullivan operated under John Y. McKane, afterward sent to prison by Mayor Gaynor, convicted of election frauds. At that time Gaynor was only a promising young lawyer. He was made special prosecutor in the McKane case by Judge Scott, of Brooklyn.

"McKane was sentenced to ten years. He was long known as the 'Czar of Coney Island,' having a sort of patent right to privileges there which he peddled as he pleased. After his conviction McKane said that under the political system then existing in New York City it was impossible for any man to play politics and remain within the law, because any political success had to be won with the weapons of existing political usage and the very judges who were using these weapons handed out sentences from the bench to men no guiltier than themselves.

"I still have editorials that appeared in some New York newspapers in which McKane was declared the victim of a vicious system, who had committed the error of getting caught. Well, 'Broken-Nose' Sullivan got himself shot in a gang row, and that is about as good an end for the fellow as I can think of, so let him go at that.

"A mighty popular downtown resort in those days was the Brighton, a concert hall in the Bowery near Great Jones Street. This place was patronized by men and women of all social grades. I saw Paderewski there one night, performing miracles on a battered grand piano for the entertainment of a distinguished company. Gathered about him were Mrs. Langtry, Harry Parker—then known along Broadway as 'The Fashion Plate'—Charlotte Carew, of the Henry Irving company; Denman Thompson, of 'Old Homestead' fame; Barney Dillon, who sang the comedy song 'Seven Ages of Shakespeare'; Charlie Mitchell, English ring champion, and his father-in-law, 'Pony' Moore; P. S. Gilmore, manager of Niblo's Garden, at that time in its heyday; Colonel Mapleson, Signor Campanari, Emma Juch, Lillian Lehman, Caroline Grau and Clementine de Vere. Some company!

"I was on duty at the Brighton one night when John L. Sullivan was given a rousing reception by an enthusiastic company of stage folk. John entered unannounced with 'Pony' Moore. Guests at the tables rose and cheered the Boston lad. It was John's first appearance in New York City as an actor in 'Honest Hearts and Willing Hands.' The big fellow was all broken up—didn't know what to do. John Drew made a little speech and demanded one from John. Sullivan tried to run out, but was headed off by a mob of stage women and compelled to respond. He delivered the same speech later made by him hundreds of times behind the footlights. All he said was 'Yours truly, John L. Sullivan. I thank you one and all.' After that there was more cheering and the wine flowed more freely.

"New York hotels used to be fruitful of police jobs in the late 80's and early 90's. Robberies committed in hotels or framed in them and carried out elsewhere were frequent. It was a common thing in those days to see noted bank robbers like 'Shang' Draper, Tom Curley and 'Midget' Tracey sitting in hotel lobbies, but they were bona fide guests. The really dangerous men were bunco steerers like Harold Crosby and Harry Moran, or the still more notorious Silas T. Blaze. That fellow was graduated from Harvard. He served as agent for two gambling houses, one on Broadway, always referred to as '818,' and the Vesper Club, an East Side resort.

"I remember a curious case in which Blaze was mixed up. It had to do with Jesse Carr, a young chap who clerked in a store when I first knew him. He ran through a fortune left him by his father, Thomas Ward Carr, a wholesale grocer. Young Carr had been chumming around with William F. McNally, a confidence man, better known as 'the Cherub.' McNally, by the way, was an understudy for Blaze, but not really in that class. Blaze charmed his victims. McNally was merely a fearless thug. Blaze retained the confidence of his victims after he robbed them. McNally's complained to the police.

"After Carr had been cleaned out by this gang he dropped gambling, worked for $15 a week, saved every cent he could until he had a $250 stake, visited '818' one night and won $40,000 in two hours. He went to Oklahoma, bought a hotel, got hold of some oil land and is now a millionaire."

THIS HERE BEIN' A GOOD FELLA

By Robert B. Peck

"SEEMS to me this country is comin' to be the international boob, the easy mark for all the world," remarked Marty McMahon, the retired bartender. "It's got so that anybody that wants anythin' comes an' panhandles us for it, an' so many of 'em gets it that they all come to think they got a perfec' right to it an' are gettin' swindled if we hold out on 'em.

"We ain't goin' to get no thanks fer it. All hands will give us the razz as soon as we shut down on 'em, an' we got to shut down on some of 'em pretty soon. They don't none of 'em adopt no resolutions of thanks, so far's I've heard.

"It looks to me like we was just tryin' to live up to a reputation we made fer ourselves. We didn't like no one to call us a hard-boiled egg an' we dug down fer anybody who come along. We didn't even have any real personal sympathy fer the folks we decided to help out—most of us didn't, anyhow.

"We just got kinda roused up by a lotta these propaganda artists. They told us about the starvin' children an' all that; an' being right fresh from the hands of the Liberty bond sellers, who wasn't near so artistic, we got out our handkerchiefs an' our purses all with one motion. We done it as much to show off as fer any other reason, seems to me.

"There was a fella used to come into the old place on Tenth Avenue was like that. Every Sat'day night there'd be a gang of bums waitin' fer him, an' this one'd touch him fer a bone an' then that one, an' then he'd buy a round o' drinks an' by the time we closed up he couldn't 'a' had much of his pay envelope left.

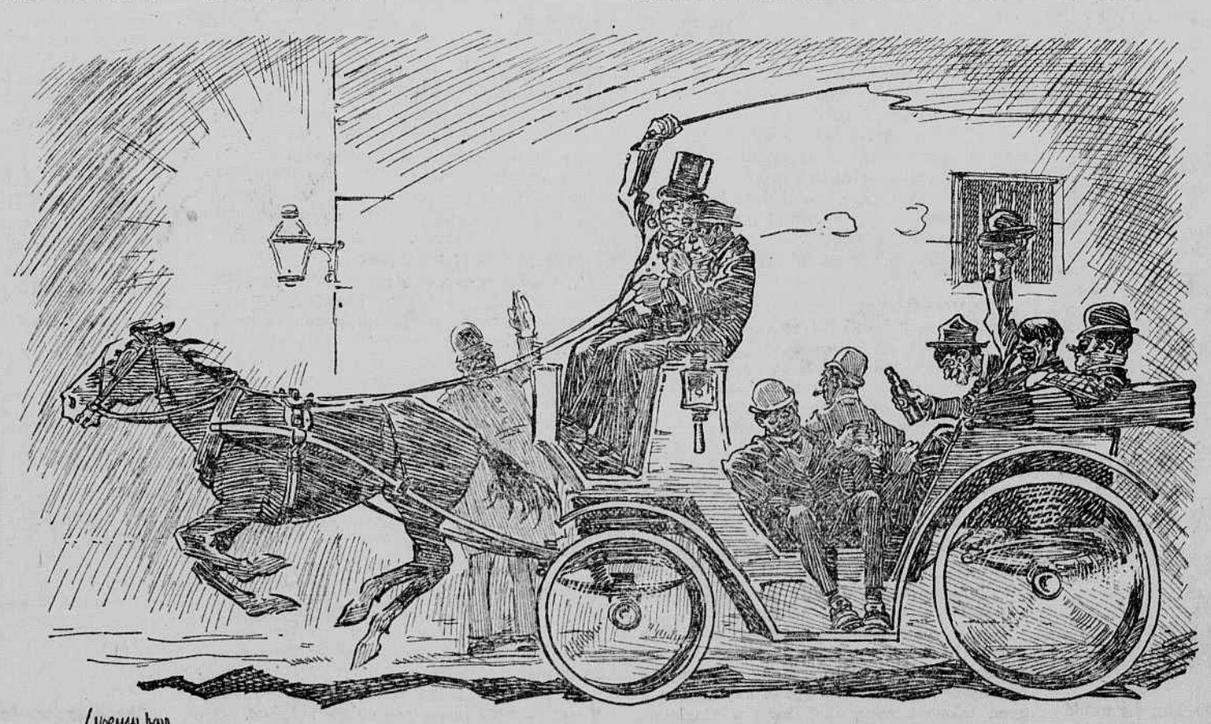
"That would 'a' been all right, too, only fer his wife an' kids who needed the money just as much as them that got it.

"It's a lot like that with this country. We want to be called a good fella, an' when a gang of international press agents gets around us we shell out free an' easy an' pat ourselves on the back an' think we're pretty noble.

"An' all the time we got pletny o' places right here in this country where we could save just as many children an' do just as much good with that money an' get a lot more results ourselves from spendin' that way, too.

"The trouble is there ain't no press agents fer all the kids here in America that needs three squares a day an' oughta have time to go to school instead o' bein' put to work when they was six or eight years old. They ain't no glory even in recognizin' that there can be such things in a country that's so generous as ours, o' course. It's a lot more fun, too, I suppose, to be a relief worker in Russia than in the South or on the East Side, an' there's more advertisin' in it.

"I ain't sayin' that we ain't done good work in Russia an' in them other countries—work that had to be done. What I say is that it wasn't real generosity that made us do it, but it was just a kind of a grandstand play when we oughta been doin' some good team work."



While the McAuley gang awaited trial Tombs discipline relaxed considerably

THE CALIPH, HY-LAN

(Continued from page five)

tain, O Conners Bey, that the populace doth not clamor so loudly that I shall be impelled to put on my shining armor and fare forth to battle for the rights of the downtrodden majority?"

And Conners Bey spake with the tongue of a courtier, saying: "The clamor, O Exalted One, is not so great that it cannot be quelled by manful effort. It is my advice that thou obtainest if possible some less worthy person to lead thy host to the war thou hast planned."

And Willi ibn Hearst clapped his hands, summoning his scribe and spake to him: "Write thou an epistle from me to Hy-lan of the Ruddy Countenance, the great Caliph."

Now it came to pass on the next morn that a chamberlain entered the room of Willi ibn Hearst, bringing a screed bearing upon its fold the visage of the good Caliph in red sealing wax. And Willi, opening the missive, read:

"From the Caliph Hy-lan to the great Sheik Willi ibn Hearst, sword of the faithful and the leader of Islam in battle; Greeting: Know, oh, valiant one, that it is my wish that thou leadest the hosts of Islam against the intrenched interests for the benefit of the people. Stay not thy hand, I pray thee, but smite the unbeliever with all the weight of thy steel. And behold if thou battlest well and mightily, thou shalt be Sultan. Indeed, were I not so devoted to thy interests, I might envy thee. Go forth, therefore, in the name of Allah and conquer."

Now, while Willi ibn Hearst read this screed, behold one of his household entered the palace of the Caliph and walked with the air of one familiar with its ways to the door of the chamber where Hy-lan sate, and, entering, gave into his hand a letter. Whereat the Caliph, noting the seal with which it was fastened, pressed it to his forehead, and opening, read:

"From the Shiek Willi ibn Hearst to the good Caliph Hy-lan, sword of Islam and leader of the Faithful in battle; Greeting: Know, oh VALLIANT one, that it is my wish that thou shouldst go forth in my place as chieftain of the hosts of Islam to fight against the perfidious INTERESTS for the benefit of the PEOPLE. Stay not thine hand, I beg, but fare forth worthily and hew the enemy down for the sake of the CAUSE. For if thou battlest and gainest the victory, thou shalt be SULTAN. Indeed, were I not devoted to thy interests and desirous of seeing thee exalted to the heights of which thou art WORTHY, I might find it in mine heart to envy thee the joys that lie before thee. Go forth in the faith of Allah and TRIUMPH!"

Now the Sheik ul Islam when he had completed reading the letter of the good Caliph sate silent for a moment and spake: "Humph!"

And the good Caliph when he had completed reading the letter of the good Shiek sate silent for a moment and then spake: "Gosh!"

And silence brooded long over both great men.